

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

Kerr-McGee Chemical Corporation (Soda Springs) Caribou County, Idaho



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

November 2002

Kerr-McGee Superfund Site Update

EPA Checkup Confirms Safe Cleanup

In September, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) completed a checkup of the Kerr-McGee Superfund site on State Road 34, one mile north of Soda Springs. EPA's checkup of the 158-acre site confirms hazardous waste cleanup continues to be effective, and that people and the environment are protected as the cleanup continues. According to EPA Project Manager, Neil Thompson, "Kerr-McGee Chemical Corporation is doing an excellent job managing the site, and the cleanup is moving forward."

EPA will review the cleanup at the Kerr-McGee site every five years to make sure progress continues. September's checkup is the first "Five-Year Review" completed since Kerr-McGee began the cleanup in 1997. Since then, Kerr-McGee has removed three unlined waste ponds, constructed two containment areas for contaminated sediments and ash, and fenced the containment areas to keep people from coming in contact with contamination.



Before cleanup began in 1997, waste ponds and calcine piles posed a threat to human health and the environment.

The containment areas are covered with a thick, impermeable plastic liner and then topped with a layer of soil. Kerr-McGee has planted crested wheat grass across the top of each containment area. During EPA's site inspection, conducted in June as part of the Five-Year Review, Thompson identified soil erosion channels along the side of one containment area at the site. The channels have since been filled with topsoil. "I don't expect erosion to be a continuing problem," says Thompson, "the grass cover should become more stable as it thickens."

With all sources of contamination either removed or contained, Kerr-McGee's work now involves maintaining the crested wheat grass cover, and monitoring groundwater every six months to make sure contaminant levels are decreasing.

Cleanup Moves Forward

"The results of groundwater monitoring show that contaminant levels are decreasing, and the contaminant plume has not increased in size," says Thompson. Every six months, Kerr-McGee tests monitoring wells on and off site. Groundwater samples are collected from the wells at two levels: 15-40 feet below ground, and 125-150 feet below ground.

In addition to groundwater monitoring, Kerr-McGee conducts a visual inspection of the property each month. Now that the contaminant sources are under control, natural processes, such as biodegradation and dilution, will gradually make the groundwater useable.



A plastic liner covers a containment area, June 2001.



A containment area is landscaped with grass, August 2001.

Site Background

In 1989, EPA placed the Kerr-McGee site on the National Priorities List, the list of the nation's most contaminated sites. A vanadium plant, which began operating in 1963, caused contamination at the site. Vanadium is a metal used to harden steel.

During operations of the vanadium plant, industrial waste water containing petroleum hydrocarbons and toxic metals such as lead and arsenic was routed to three unlined waste ponds.

When contaminated waste water leaked from the ponds, it contaminated groundwater beneath the site and at two nearby springs. Fortunately, neither Soda Springs public drinking water nor nearby private wells were contaminated.

In addition to generating liquid wastes, Kerr-McGee stockpiled a fine-grained, black ash, called calcine, at the site. Calcine is a by-product of the vanadium production process. As part of the cleanup, Kerr-McGee enclosed calcine ash, pond sludges and bag house dust in covered, landscaped containment areas.

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